

don de M. G. Miller

REPORT
OF
FRED. LAW OLMSTED
ON
Mount Royal Park.

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209 WEST 46TH STREET,
NEW YORK, 23RD NOV., 1874.

TO THE HONORABLE THE COMMISSIONERS OF MOUNT
ROYAL PARK, MONTREAL ;

GENTLEMEN,—I herein transcribe the draft of a proposition made to you last Monday, with modifications, as desired by you, and, as I understand, then provisionally accepted.

Forecasting your undertaking, I judge that the principal construction work for the next year should be that of a road and of one or more walks by which the mountain can be ascended, and as I much prefer, before maturing a design for laying out the top of the mountain, to have an opportunity of more carefully studying its summer conditions, I make the following propositions :

1st. I will furnish you before the first of May next with a plat showing the changes which I shall recommend to be made in the boundaries of your property, and a plan of approach roads and such other matters as it will, in my judgment, be feasible and desirable for you to operate upon during the working season of 1875 ; together with such general indications of the main features of a plan for the whole, as will be necessary to the intelligent judgment upon the parts of the plan more fully matured and submitted for your adoption,

2nd. I will subsequently furnish you with a general plan for laying out your whole property on a scale of one hundred feet to the inch ; also, if my recommendation as to change of boundary are adopted, with a special plan for the proposed little park district on a scale of fifty feet to the inch ; and another for certain parts of the property which you will be recommended to sell, showing proposed streets and lots.

3rd. I will also give you a general report describing and explaining the plans, giving the reasons for the several

important features and advice as to the method of carrying them out.

4th. I will deliver all the above plans and the report before the first of May (or before they shall be required with reference to the opening of operations in the spring) of 1876, and until I deliver them, will give you such services as advisory Landscape Architect as I deem to be necessary, without special charge.

5th. On the presumption that the ground to be covered does not materially exceed five hundred acres (say 530) and that no change or addition to your scheme will be made adding essentially to my responsibility, I will receive as my full compensation for the above specified services a sum of money equivalent to five thousand dollars in United States currency, to be paid to me in New York, as follows: Five hundred dollars on or before the tenth day of January, 1875; five hundred dollars within thirty days after the delivery of the first plat and plans; and the remaining sum of four thousand dollars at the completion of this engagement (unless on evidence of progress in the meantime you shall, on my application, deem it just to pay me a part of the same on account).

I shall also require that you reimburse me for all outlays in necessary travelling expenses or other expenses incurred under your special instructions from time to time, and that all desirable aid and facilities shall be given me whereby my work, when on the ground, shall be better advanced and proceed more advantageously for your interest.

It will, of course, be a condition of this arrangement that you furnish me with a copy of the topographical map now in preparation, as you have agreed to do, in due time, before the 1st of February next.

I am, gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

FRED. LAW OLMSTED.

209, WEST 46th STREET,

NEW YORK, 21st November, 1874.

To the Honorable,

the Commissioners of

Mount-Royal Park, Montreal.

GENTLEMEN,

I have the honor to comply with your request, that I would repeat in writing the substance of certain observations verbally made to you last Monday, in regard to your property of Mount Royal.

As a general rule, rugged and broken ground is the last that should be chosen for a public recreation ground in the immediate vicinity of a large city. It is unnecessary that I should show the objections to it; the simple fact that your property differs so greatly in its topographical characteristics from ground, which would be generally and properly described as "park-like," raises a sufficient presumption that it is unsuitable for a park.

The question, whether it can, by any means, be economically adapted for the purposes for which you intend it, is, therefore, first in order, and, as it involves a consideration of the main features of a general design for dealing with it, it will be the chief object of my present communication to give you the conclusions of my judgment upon this question, and to indicate more or less distinctly the processes by which they have been reached.

The chief elements of value of all recreation grounds for the use of the general public of large towns are: 1st the change of air afforded; 2nd the power of their scenery to counteract conditions which tend to nervous depression or irritability; 3rd the ease and pleasure with which these advantages may be used.

Of the first two of these elements of value, Mount-Royal, in its present unimproved condition, offers a larger measure than any other place equally near so large a population of which I have knowledge, and by judicious means, as I shall indicate further on, its advantages of scenery may be heightened, and its disadvantages lessened. The question, then, is, whether its possible value in these respects can be made available with due ease, comfort and economy? My doubts on this point were rapidly lessened after I got above the craggy face of the mountain toward the city, and found myself upon a surface but moderately broken and rugged, and essentially an undulating and wooded table-land, from nearly all points of which broad and delightful distant landscapes are commanded.

A survey of this district soon satisfied me that as far as roads, walks, seats and other conveniences of exercise, rest and refreshment are concerned, there is no extraordinary difficulty in providing within it all that is essential to your purpose, except as it may arise from the necessity of unusual precautions against the bolting of horses and the slipping of heedless persons over the steep declivities, and of establishing not merely security in this respect, but a tranquilizing sense of security in the minds of all classes of visitors.

Passing this point as one of detail, it is a more important and difficult branch of the question whether, these advantages being provided, the use [of them can be had by the people generally of the city, with moderate ease, comfort and cheapness? The conditions necessary to be considered before giving an answer will, perhaps, be better recognized if the inquiry is made from the point of a physician considering the case of a poor patient, feeble, timid and nervous: or of a convalescent to whom change of air and scene would be highly beneficial, provided it could be had without too much fatigue, discom-

fort or exciting anxiety. First, then, the physician has to reflect whether what is likely to be gained through quiet, pleasurable recreation while moving or resting in the fresh air of the mountain, is likely to be neutralized or worse through the fatigue, worry and excitement that will be suffered in the journey to and from it: and, second, he has to consider whether his patient can afford the cost of the excursion? The conclusions which, in course of time, will be reached in thousands of such cases, will be favorable or unfavorable to the chances of recovery, or of rapid or prolonged and tedious convalescence, of the patient, according to the arrangements which you will determine to make. Considering what is practicable, I find two possible routes for ascending the mountain without going to the rear of it: one on the north and north-west side; the other on the north-east and east. The first is more inviting near the base, but in the upper half of it tolerable grades and curves, for a road of desirable breadth, can only be obtained at great expense, and, the ground being valuable for another purpose, I am disposed to think, at least for years to come, it will be better to have but a single main approach road, and that on the east side.

Here, from the top of the mountain as far down, at least, as the McTavish monument, there is no extraordinary difficulty in the way of preparing a road, two rods wide, by which a carriage may be driven up or down at a steady, moderate trot, moving smoothly and quietly, while beautiful distant views are opening to the south and west through frames of foliage that shut out any discordant nearer objects. A satisfactory connection might be made, though with more difficulty, between the mountain road at the monument and the nearest streets of the city now in use. But the grades of these streets are so much steeper than those of the roads above need to be, that, whether in ascending or descending, horses would be

brought to a walk, and in passing through them at those periods of the day when the park would be the most attractive and its influence most beneficial, all the annoyances and dangers of a blocked street would often be experienced.

Those who have given little consideration to the subject will probably think that Montreal will hardly ever supply such a stream of travel to the mountain as I seem to imagine. I will remark, therefore, that no experience of Montreal under existing circumstances will much aid a judgment of what will result from a perfection of proper arrangements for pleasure driving, as a few facts will indicate. For instance, since the opening of the park drives in New York, the number of persons keeping private carriages is estimated to have increased fully ten fold; the number and value of public carriages adapted to pleasure driving having also, in the same period, increased at a rate far beyond that of population and wealth. In Brooklyn the number of private carriages was thought to have doubled in two years after the opening of the park. A similar, though less marked experience, has been had in Buffalo, Chicago, and other American towns. The value of a pleasure carriage is, in fact, found to have been unknown as long as its use was limited to ordinary streets and roads.

Montreal is a prosperous city and rapidly enlarging its borders; the number of people able to keep carriages will in time be much greater than at present; the number able to employ public carriages will increase even more rapidly. The views commanded from the Mountain—surpassing in expanse, beauty and variety those of any of the common resorts of tourists on the continent—will, when they can be enjoyed with such ease and comfort as it will be practicable for you to secure, add largely to the number of visitors staying in the city who will supply another element in the throng to be accommodated.

A reasonable consideration of these conditions and

probabilities will satisfy you that if the future travel to the mountain is to be all or mainly directed into any one of the existing streets by which the vicinity of the McTavish monument is approached from the lower ground, it would be wholly inadequate to carry it except, in a way which would be extremely tedious, provoking and often alarming.

Here, then, the physician would hesitate because here a hundred yards of movement would be liable to cause more fatigue and undesirable excitement to the patient than a mile beyond.

Here, then, also, the difficulty of cost would be largely augmented for, to ascend a grade like that of Peel, or worse, of McTavish Street, two horses would be required to move a load such as one would take with equal ease above, and the rate of wear and tear not only of horses, but of harness, carriage and road way, would be fully doubled.

Under such an arrangement the dividends to be obtained from the capital you shall invest in all your park arrangements, will be seriously less than they will be if you make such other approaches as I trust to be practicable. What ought to be hoped for in respect to the cost of a drive will be evident from what is accomplished elsewhere. For instance, the ordinary charge for carriage hire in the streets of New York is nearly double what it is in Montreal but the Park Commissioners of New York have had no difficulty in causing a dozen or more carriages to be provided, comfortable low-hung covered vehicles suitable for weakly persons in which passengers are taken at a rate of fare of four cents a mile for a course of five miles, or of five cents a mile for a course of $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles. In Brooklyn and Philadelphia, the Park Commissioners have done still better than this and the difficulty of doing better in your case lies less in the topography of the mountain than in the way your city has thus far been laid out and built up.

My present object is rather to show what should be the

line of study to be pursued in planning your proposed improvements than to offer you even a suggestion of a plan for them but, to illustrate what I should hope to be practicable in respect to the approaches below the mountain, I will say that it might be something like this: To extend the road which I have suggested would be led spirally down the mountain-side from the southward with a regular moderate descent along the rear of Sir Hugh Allan's grounds and afterwards by a more devious course across the steep and broken slopes to the northward, until, in the rear of the Hotel Dieu, existing streets are reached running with an easy grade, in one direction, to the heart of the city, in the other, skirting its present advanced building line parallel to and on the side opposite the river front. It might then be further extended in the latter direction in the form of a broad boulevard or park-way exclusively for the use of pleasure carriages, crossing all the streets running from the river.

This being done, from whatever part of the city north of Victoria Square, carriages should be started to go to the mountain, they would enter the park drive north of the steep foot-slopes and, until this drive was reached and they were disengaged from all other street traffic, they would no where be concentrated or add materially to the ordinary number of vehicles in any street, while the average time required for entering upon a smooth quiet road with no liability to street obstructions would be less than half as much as it would, if the park drive was first to be south of the reservoir. For the accommodation of those living to the south of Victoria Square, special branch approaches to the same main approach would be required, one of which should be to the north of the Reservoir another to the south of the McTavish monument. An additional sub-route of approach still further south is practicable through land not yet expensively improved, and two others from the Côté des Neiges road. Foot

approaches should closely follow the main carriage approach and its laterals, but it is desirable that there should also be one broad easy walk to the top of the mountain having attractions peculiar to itself, and several minor foot-paths scaling the crags more directly. Whenever street railways shall be laid to the foot of the mountain, an inclined lift or elevator will likewise be desirable to save feeble persons and young children the hard toil of its ascent.

Reverting to the matter of the general aspect of the scenery of the mountain, I would observe that the distant prospects in all directions, offer such controlling attractions that some of them, being commanded from nearly all parts of the ground, the immediate local landscape conditions are of much less consequence than they usually are in pleasure grounds, and that it is not undesirable that they should be subdued in character. Operations for their improvement should, therefore, not be ambitious, and should be intended, first, to relieve the surface of the mountain of the accidental and transient conditions through which it has at present an unnecessarily desolate and melancholy aspect; next, without destroying the essential picturesqueness of its natural features, to add a greater beauty of foliage; next, to hold attention in directions where the finest views will be seen to the best advantage and to furnish them with more harmonious and better composed foregrounds; next, to subordinate and, as far as may be practicable, obscure with suitable natural objects the constructions necessary to the convenient use of the ground (as these must in the end, be extensive and more or less too fine for harmony with its general character); and finally, to avoid in these and all respects an ordinary conventional gardening style of work, as finical, unseemly and out of character with the genius of the place.

I omit the observations made to you verbally in regard

to the desirableness of a small park proper, in distinction from the larger mountain and forest district of your ground, because of the impossibility of doing justice to the subject without the advantage of demonstration on the site, or over a sufficient topographical map. I will merely observe that you have, in addition to the ground which I have thus far considered, a small area of a different character, and that it is fortunately situated to serve as a foil, through its natural amenity and the simple, quiet, secluded and pastoral character which can be given it, to the grandly local and rugged heights and declivities of the main body.

Surveying the whole property with due regard for the considerations I have indicated ; assuming that the treatment of the mountain top shall be such as I have advised, and that some such arrangements as I have also suggested, shall be provided by which access to and ascent of the mountain shall be made as rapid, cheap, convenient and comfortable as is practicable, it will be seen that there is no reason to doubt that a public recreation ground can be formed within the limits of your property, which shall compare favorably as a means of health for the people who are to be invited to use it, with that of any other city of the world.

You are to be congratulated upon the good judgment which has governed the selection of the parcels of land which you have had to purchase and in the good fortune which has allowed you to find so large an aggregate body of land on the immediate border of the city which could be acquired without change for costly improvements. Parts of some of the properties which you have obtained, may, I think, be regarded as relatively unimportant for your purpose, and with a view to limit the cost of your undertaking, may be otherwise disposed of. There are yet also, on the boundaries of your ground, some small patches, of which, with a view to keeping under your

control the best landscape effects, you should, if possible, obtain possession. I can not at present accurately define the bounds of these fragments but have no doubt that those which I think may be dispensed with, will exceed in market value those which I should recommend to be acquired.

I beg to express my obligations to Mr. MacQuisten, your city surveyor, Mr. Smith, his deputy, and Mr. McGibbon your superintendent, for their cheerful, zealous and valuable assistance in my examination of the ground.

I am, gentlemen,

your obedient servant,

FRED. LAW OLMSTED.

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CITY OF NEW YORK
JAN 10 1864